

Types of ICT and their use in education and entertainment

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Abstract

Nowadays, technology has become an essential tool which can be used in every single aspect of our daily life. Nevertheless, this paper will focus mainly on two particular aspects: education and entertainment. Thus, we will explore how different tools such as computers, mobile phones, emails or instant messaging, among others, contribute positively to the learning process of the English as a Foreign Language as well as to students' personal development.

Keywords: ICT, English as a Foreign Language, personal development, education, entertainment

Título: Tipos de TIC y su uso en educación y entretenimiento.

Resumen

Hoy día, la tecnología se ha convertido en una herramienta indispensable que se puede utilizar en todas las facetas de nuestra vida. Sin embargo, este artículo se centra principalmente en dos aspectos: la educación y el entretenimiento. Por consiguiente, se analizará cómo diferentes herramientas tales como ordenadores, teléfonos móviles, emails, o mensajería instantánea, entre otras, contribuyen positivamente al proceso de aprendizaje del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera así como al desarrollo personal del alumnado.

Palabras clave: TIC, Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, desarrollo personal, educación, entretenimiento.

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INTRODUCTION

There are a huge number of new technologies to use in our daily life not only as a means of entertainment but also to be implemented in the classroom or to work with at home for learning purposes. Regarding the latter, some of these new technologies benefit the learning of the language and others benefit the work of the teacher, some are appropriate for the development of certain skills, etc.

It is impossible to explain every single technology in detail due to the lack of space and time, therefore this section will only focus on the most relevant ones.

1. COMPUTERS AND MOBILE PHONES

As stated by Erben, Ban & Castañeda (2009, p. 84), "computer-mediated communication (CMC) is the umbrella term that refers to human interaction by means of computers". The resource becoming the protagonist in the educational context regarding the use of ICTs was the computer. This resource was one of the first ICT more frequently used after cassettes and videos.

Regarding the learning of EFL, the use of computers was known as CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning). This resource became very useful since "CMC emphasises interaction among learners, which is seen as a fundamental component for second language acquisition" (Zhang, 2012, p.1). Some advantages provided by CMC for the learning of English as a Foreign Language and quoted by Erben et al. (2009) are: "increasing an ELL's access to comprehensible input (Warschauer and Healey, 1998), providing ELLs with opportunities for output production (Blake, 2000) and giving ELLs opportunities to negotiate meaning (Fernández-García and Martínez-Arbelaiz, 2002)" (Erben et al., 2009, p.84-85).

On the other hand, the mobile phone is widespread among young people but also among adults in general terms (Fortunati & Magnanelli, 2002). It is being adapted to the educational context nowadays but “the concept of mobile learning is not new in the educational context since it has been used in the training projects of hundreds of academic institutions which should be adapted to the technological reality” (Bilingüismo y Tecnología, 2013, para.1, our own translation). Among the advantages provided by these tools in the classroom it is remarkable that “they offer a great flexibility in the learning (...), activities available for mobile devices (...), access to (academic) information online (...), better autonomy, (...) they foster interaction between teachers-students (...), students may learn at their own rate (...), teachers and learners can have access to a wide range of contents” (Bilingüismo y Tecnología, 2013, para.2, our own translation).

Regarding the use of this resource in the EFL classroom, nowadays there are a great number of mobile device applications for the learning of English such as Uspeak and Voxy. As Delgado (2012) points out, these tools allow people to be exposed to a different language learning methodology at any time and place. These resources offer exercises or common sentences. Moreover, there are a huge number of translators as applications for mobile devices.

Nowadays not only the computer makes use of the internet but also the mobile phone. Internet is one of the most used resources, not only in the English classroom, but also in many other academic disciplines: “the web is a source of content which can be used as a window on the wider world outside your class, and is –of course– a readily available collection of authentic material” (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007, p.27). In English as a Foreign Language, Internet can:

contribute to [students’] language development in a variety of ways, for example, by giving them the opportunity to build vocabulary or improve their listening skills. Lower-level classes can be engaged with visual and multimedia materials, the use of songs and other video materials (Dudeney et al., 2007, p.28).

Some activities students can do with internet in the EFL classroom are:

- practising different aspects of English in the classroom and at home.
- communication with other students who learn English in Spain or EU.
- learning basic aspects of English speaking countries, focusing on culture and customs.
- listening to music or watch videos in which English is used (Romero-Lacal, 2009, p.7, our own translation).

The role of teachers is important when deciding between ELT¹ websites or authentic websites: “Your choice will depend largely on what you want to achieve with it” (Dudeney et al. 2007, p.28). It depends on the level of English of our students, the task, etc.

Authentic sites can be chosen to fit your learners’ interest. This is a key factor in keeping motivation high in your electronic classroom. (...) try to find ones which have an easy structure and navigation and with smaller chunks of text per page. These will be more approachable and understandable (...) Authentic sites also provide an ideal opportunity to work through the issues of “total comprehension” that plenty of learners have to deal with at some point in their studies. They can be guided towards being comfortable with understanding the content of a site and identifying what they need to know or find out without getting bogged down in having to understand every word on the screen (Dudeney et al., 2007, p.29).

There are many ICT which people can make use of both from computers or mobile phones, in most cases by using the internet. The best known ones are online dictionaries, CD-ROMS and MP3/MP4, e-mails, instant messaging, skype, social networks, blogs and wikis.

2. ONLINE DICTIONARIES

Traditionally, EFL students used printed paper dictionaries but this involves waste of time when looking up words. Online dictionaries, which can also be downloaded from the internet, are very useful in this sense. In Dudeney et al.’s view (2007), the positive aspect of making use of online dictionaries is that they can facilitate the learning process of the language thanks to the audio recordings in British and American English included in these dictionaries, with which students can practise pronunciation. Moreover, there are games and exercises with which students can learn certain words,

¹ English Language Teaching

information on typical errors, etc. Besides, a wide range of online dictionaries (such as wordreference) is available on the web. As explained by Dudeney et al. (2007), “these electronic dictionaries provide a powerful resource for students working on their own and for you [as teachers] in the classroom” (p.104).

3. E-MAILS

Erben et al. (2009, p. 120) explain that the “e-mail makes the exchange of electronic messages and computer files between computers possible. In the classroom, these exchanges can take place between teacher and student, student and teacher, student and student, or student and any person outside the classroom”. This resource is similar to instant messaging. Nevertheless, its texts are longer, and give more “input” to the learner:

Reading and writing emails either in or outside class time gives a learner more exposure to the target language, and interaction is ‘real’ in the sense that learners are writing to real people –either the teacher or other learners-using a ‘real’ medium (Dudeney et al., 2007, p. 62, emphasis in original).

Students will learn not only the language but also the different levels of formality available when writing an email, depending on the addressee. “It is a good idea to remind learners that (...) there are levels of formality in email writing. An email written to enquire about a job vacancy will have different level of formality to an email sent to a close friend.” (Dudeney et al., 2007, p.63).

E-mails can help teachers to develop certain tasks or projects in order to make our students learn the language through them, such as the ‘keypal projects’: “If learners are writing to learners of other countries, as keypal project, this allows them to make contact and interact with people with different first languages and from other cultures” (Dudeney, et al. 2007, p.62).

4. INSTANT MESSAGING

According to Erben et al. (2009, p. 125), “instant messaging (IM) is a text-based synchronous form of electronic communication. It requires two or more people to be online at the same time and these participants communicate via the instant messaging software”. This tool is very useful nowadays, since it is fast and easy to be used in order to communicate thanks to mobile phones (Whatsapp, Line, etc). In Dudeney et al.’s own words (2007, p. 71):

Chat has enormous potential to link students around the world, in real time. It is a technology that many learners will often be familiar with and will use in their social lives, so it is worth exploiting in the classroom whenever possible.

Besides, it is employed to learn English. Thus, Erben et al. (2009) indicate:

“(...) IM provides the ELL with a realistic opportunity to practise writing skills and to get immediate feedback (...) A native speaker is more likely to help an ELL with grammar and/or vocabulary because both are focusing on written language use to get the task completed” (p.126).

However, this resource should be used carefully, since some disadvantages can be discovered:

(...) but it has also been noted online chat, especially text chat, does not follow the same rules of interaction as face-to-face conversation. Text chat can often appear disjointed: conversation threads get lost or questions are ignored: there are overlapping turns; and conventions for taking the floor are not automatically clear. (Dudeney et al., 2007, p. 75).

5. SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks, e.g. Tuenti, Facebook, Twitter, Hi5, MySpace, etc. describe “all those tools designed for the creation of spaces which facilitate the configuration of communities of social exchange” (Cobo-Romaní & Pardo-Kuklinski, 2007, p.13 our own translation). As Rodríguez (2010) points out, social networks have become a new means for better communication and have contributed to the establishment of new personal relations.

In any case, social networks also contribute to the learning of language, so learners can practise EFL in an oral and written way with other people who can teach them new grammatical structures, new vocabulary, etc. Hence, González (2013) explains:

In accordance with a study carried out by Kaplan International Colleges, the use of social networks, such as Twitter, may favour the learning of English:

1. Short sentences: Taking the constant updating of contents into account, vocabulary will be improved and new vocabulary will be assimilated, making the speech more fluent and complete.

2. Communities: Getting involved in communities or in topics which are interesting will make learners more motivated. It is recommendable to follow those people who also want to learn English.

3. Hashtags: This symbol is used for categorizing tweets. The most frequent hashtags among EFL students are:

#EFL/ESL: Tweets in relation with the learning and teaching of EFL.

#eal: Tweets about how to use English as an additional language.

#ellchat: Platform used to chat with other students of EFL.

#grammar: Tweets in relation to grammar, punctuation, etc.

#TESOL: Hashtag for EFL teachers (para. 3, our own translation).

6. BLOGS

A blog is “a website with regular diary or journal entries (...) Most of the blogs will allow readers to comment on blog entries, thereby creating an online community around a common topic, interest or person” (Dudeney et al., 2007, p. 86-87).

Regarding the use of blogs in the English academic area:

A teacher may decide to use a blog to provide his learners with new comments on issues, extra reading practice or homework, online links, a summary of a class for learners who were unable to attend, study tips, and so on. In this case, learners will access and read, and possibly add comments to the blog outside the classroom. (Dudeney et al., 2007, p.87).

In agreement with this author, blogs can belong to teachers, learners, students from other courses and other countries, etc. In addition, “teachers can do searches on these websites to find a partner classroom in the country where the target language is spoken” (Erben, et al. 2009, p.137).

7. WIKIS

Wikis and blogs are not the same since a wiki is “a collaborative website that many people can work on or edit” (Erben et al., 2009, p.133). Basically, a wiki is a website where everyone can publish, add, edit or delete the content, so it is a group work. The participation in a wiki entails the development of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (1978) as participants “are socially mediated by others in a problem-solving situation”. (Erben et al., 2009, p.134), so it is not a useless resource. The negotiation involved in the collaboration on a wiki project necessarily helps students to develop successful problem-solving skills (Erben et al., 2009 p. 135). As Dudeney et al. (2007) mention, the most popular wiki is Wikipedia.

Regarding its contribution to the learning of English, “a wiki lends itself especially well to collaborative writing” (Dudeney et al, 2007, p.95). In this way, students can learn from the teacher’s writing and from other students’, they can learn different types of writing, correct or learn from their mistakes, etc. In a related vein, Garza & Hern (2006) suggest that wikis make writing seem more of a process than a series of static drafts that are tweaked and twiddled.

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